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Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AID-05 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-08 FRB-03
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SP-02 LAB-04 SIL-01 OMB-01 NSC-05 SS-15 STR-07
CEA-01 PA-01 /087 W
----------109961 212114Z /64
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FM AMCONSUL QUEBEC
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1255
INFO RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 961
AMCONSUL MONTREAL PRIORITY
ALL OTHER CANADIAN POSTS BY POUCH

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT CA
SUBJECT: QUEBEC REACTION TO FEDERAL PROVINCIAL ECONOMIC CONFERENCE

REF: OTTAWA 00771

1. ON BASIS RANDOM SOUNDING OF LOCAL OPINION, I GAUGE LEVESQUE'S WALKOUT FROM ECONOMIC CONFERENCE HAS DONE HIS IMAGE SOME DAMAGE WITH IMPORTANT UNCOMMITTED AUDIENCE IN QUEBEC. PARTISANS ON EITHER SIDE OF CONSTITUTIONAL QUESTION HAVE, AS WOULD BE EXPECTED, CONDEMNED OR APPLAUDED CONFERENCE AND LEVESQUE'S PERFORMANCE FOLLOWING DICTATES THEIR OWN COMMITMENTS. AT LEAST IN PUBLIC, MORE LOQUASCIOUS PEQUISTES HAVE GLEEFULLY DISCLAIMED ON RENE'S "SLAMMING THE DOOR IN TRUDEAU'S FACE." AT OTHER END OF POLITICAL SPECTRUM, LEVESQUE IS BEING ACCUSED OF IRRESPONSIBILITY FOR "SABOTAGING" CONFERENCE AIMED AT FINDING SOLUTIONS TO COUNTRY'S CRITICAL ECONOMIC PROBLEM. BOTH TRUDEAU AND LEVESQUE ARE BEING ACCUSED OF USING CONFERENCE TO FURTHER THEIR OWN POLITICAL
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PURPOSES. LATTER ACCUSATIONS ARE HEARD FROM UNCOMMITTED AS WELL AS PARTISAN SOURCES.

2. THERE HAS BEEN FREQUENT QUESTIONING OF LEVESQUE'S WAITING UNTIL THE END OF CONFERENCE TO WALK OUT? MOST ATTRIBUTE HIS ACTION EITHER TO LOSS OF SANG-FROID IN FACE OF "BLATANT PROVOCATION" BY TRUDEAU'S "POLITICAL HIT MAN," ANDRE

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OUELLET, OR TO PREARRANGE CONFERENCE STRATEGY AIMED AT GAINING

POLITICAL POINTS WITH QUEBEC VOTERS. NEITHER OF THESE POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS CAST LEVESQUE IN FLATTERIN LIGHT. WHATEVER REASON FOR LEVESQUE'S PRECIPITOUS DEPARTURE, MANY BELIEVE HE HAS NOT SERVED QUEBEC INTERESTS IN TIME OF GRAVE ECONOMIC CRISIS BY WALKOUT. RATHER THEY BELIEVE HE SHOULD HAVE STAYED AND CONTINUED TO ATTEMPT - AS HE HAD EARLIER IN CONFERENCE- TO PIN DOWN FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TO PROGRAM OF MORE SPECIFIC MEASURES TO DEAL WITH IMMEDIATE ECONOMIC PROBLEMS. ONE ALSO HEARS COMMENT IN QUEBEC THAT WALKOUT DOES NOT BODE WELL FOR ABILITY PQ GOVERNMENT FORM AMICABL FUTURE RELATIONSHIP WITH REST OF CANADA ESSENTIAL TO ITS SOVEREIGNTY-ASSOCIATION FORMULA. THERE ARE OTHERS WHO - AS CLAUDE RYAN DID ON FEBRUARY 19- SPECULATE THAT LEVESQUE'S IRASCIBILITY IS INDICATION HE LACKS INNER STRENGTH TO STAND UP TO PRESSURE.

3. ON THE OTHER HAND. TRUDEAU AND HIS MINISTERS ARE NOT BEING WIDELY ACCLAIMED AS HEROS. EVEN SOME QUEBEC FEDERALISTS ARE AMONG THEIR CRITICS. FEW SOPHISTICATED QUEBECKERS OF ANY PERSUASION DOUBT THAT CONFERENCE WAS ORGANIZED BY TRUDEAU AS PART OF PRE-ELECTION PREPARATIONS. CBC FRENCH SERVICE ADDED TO THIS CONVICTION BY COMMENTING OFTEN IN ITS COVERAGE OF THE CONFERENCE ON FACT LIBERALS HAD COMMISSIONED LARGE AMOUNT OF FILM COVERAGE OF CONFERENCE WHICH WAS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ALLEGED TO BE DESTINED TO BE USED IN COMING FEDERAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN.

4. OUELLET'S HARD HITTING ATTACK ON LEVESQUE SEEMS TO HAVE CUT IN TWO DIRECTIONS. LEVESQUE HAS PERSONALLY LOST FACE BY "OVER REACTING" TO PROVOCATION. SEVERAL PEOPLE HAVE COMMENTED TO ME THAT TRUDEAU UNDOUBTEDLY ARRANGED ATTACK BY OUELLET HOPING LEVESQUE WOULD LOSE HIS COOL. ON OTHER HAND, LEVESQUE HAS GOTTEN SYMPATHY AS VICTIM OF WHAT SOME CONSIDER UNNECESSARILY BRUTAL PERSONAL ATTACK BY OUELLET WHO IS NOT MUCH ADMIRED IN QUEBEC EVEN AMONG LIBERALS.

5. CONFERENCE ITSELF WAS OVERSHADOWED IN QUEBEC BY LEVESQUE'S WALKOUT. LISE BISONETTE IN EDITORIAL IN LE DEVOIR OF FEBRUARY 17 ENTITLED "A MODEST EXERCISE" SEEMED SUM UP THOUGHTFUL OPINION. CONFERENCE, SHE SAID, WAS NEITHER TOTAL FAILURE NOR GREAT TRIUMPHE. TAKING RELAXED VIEW OF CHARGES OF POLITICAL MANIPULATION, BISONETTE COMMENTED THAT SHE ONLY SURPRISED BY AMOUNT OF ASTONISHMENT - REAL OR PRETENDED - IT CAUSED. MCNAMARA

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